

the lights of my body

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/54347614) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/54347614>.

Rating:

Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:

No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:

M/M

Fandom:

Masters of the Air (TV 2024)

Relationship:

Gale "Buck" Cleven/John Clarence "Bucky" Egan

Characters:

Gale "Buck" Cleven, John Clarence "Bucky" Egan

Additional Tags:

I'll take care of you / it's rotten work / not to me not if it's you,
Established Relationship, john egan's crumbling mental state

Language:

English

Stats:

Published: 2024-03-09 Words: 1,794 Chapters: 1/1

the lights of my body

by [iphigenias](#)

Summary

“Nicer’n the Ritz,” he’d slurred quietly, his breath ghosting over the inside of Gale’s wrist, and Gale had snorted, letting his hand tremble where it rested by the bridge of John’s nose.

“Like you’ve ever been to the goddamn Ritz.”

/ after the fight in the stalag. Gale goes looking for John.

Notes

I sat down intending to write more of my "what took you so long?" series then gene messaged me and said girl [john] you need ssris, and erin in her tags on the buckbucky fight said they were scissoring, and I laughed so much at both of them I couldn't get the scene out of my head. TO BE CLEAR there is no scissoring in this fic. (or is there)

Title is from Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz:

So in my defense, when he touched me the lights of my body came on.

In my defense, the windows were thrown open. In my defense, *spring*.

As always, this fic is based upon callum turner and austin butler making me absolutely deranged. No disrespect is intended toward the real men who served. I'm on tumblr at [oatflatwhite](#) <3

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Gale lets John cool off for an hour before going to find him.

Bucky's always been like that—quick to anger, quick to forgive. He feels the way he flies: with everything he's got. But whereas before Bremen the anger had a softer edge—was belied by a smile, or the relaxed curve of Bucky's hand around a beer—there's a sharpness to it now. Bucky's been all angles since he walked through the gates of the stalag with bruised ribs and a bloodied eye. Gale doesn't know how to navigate him anymore.

He finds John in his bunk, where he's lying facing the wall. He could be asleep were it not for the line of tension strung clean across his shoulders. "Bucky," Gale says, hovering in the doorway, rapping his knuckles quietly on the frame for want of anything better to do. John doesn't move. "I know you're awake."

The blanket rustles. John laughs. "King Cleven, down from his mountain. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Would you quit being an ass?"

John rolls over to look at him. He has a pillow crease, red and angry, stamped into his cheek and his hair, already messy from the fight, has stuck to his forehead with dirt and sweat. "Yes, sir," he says, glaring at Gale, who sighs and takes a seat by the window. The glass is cool when he rests his head up against it, and if he tips his gaze just so he can make out the boys sitting round the stump remover outside. Most of them are smoking, kicked back and looking up at the clouded sun.

"You can't do that again," he says quietly, staring out the window. "You're scaring the men."

"Last I checked, they weren't children."

Gale turns to look at him. "So why is it you're acting like a child?"

John glares some more. Gale holds his gaze, until John groans exaggeratedly and drops it. He rolls onto his back, bringing his hands to his face. "I don't know how much longer I can do this," he admits into them, the words muffled, but clear enough to Gale who's been listening out for Bucky for going on four years now, and isn't about to let up. "I don't know how you—I don't know how."

“One foot in front of the other.”

“Don’t you fucking give me that crap.” John’s sitting up. He swings his legs over the side of the bunk and hops down, boots he hadn’t bothered to take off thudding against the boards. “I’m not one of your fucking crew, Buck. Don’t—don’t treat me like one.” He’s standing over Gale now, who has to lift his head to look at him. John’s so thin—they all are. It’s been enough time that the bruising on his face has long since gone down, but Gale knows it still aches him sometimes. He’d broken his orbital socket, and a stalag in the wintertime is probably the last place in the world you want to recover from something like that. Sometimes John will sit there, while the rest of them hover round the radio, elbow on his knee and hand over his eye. He’ll brush his thumb back and forth over the bone.

He’d passed out, that first day, not long after Gale had reached him and folded him into a hug so tight it made John gasp around his bruised ribs. They’d carried him to the med bay, or what passed as one round here—Gale and Demarco, Crank and Brady hovering on each side to jump in and help if needed. The doc had stripped John’s shirt, cool and methodical, and Gale had to look away for the briefest moment at the bruises mottling his chest. They couldn’t be from just the bail-out.

His eye had been worse than his ribs, though, and the nasty gash on the back of his head had already scabbed over and started to heal. Doc tore up a bedsheet for fresh cloths to wipe John down; Gale watched him do it for less than five seconds before he was reaching out, almost without meaning to. “I got it,” he’d said, and asked the doc to shoo the rest of the guys out before wetting the cloth and cleaning the blood carefully around John’s eye.

He’d opened it, then, like he knew it was Gale above him. “Nicer’n the Ritz,” he’d slurred quietly, his breath ghosting over the inside of Gale’s wrist, and Gale had snorted, letting his hand tremble where it rested by the bridge of John’s nose.

“Like you’ve ever been to the goddamn Ritz.”

That had made John laugh, which in turn had made him wince. Gale shushed him and cleaned him the rest of the way up. By the time he was done John was passed out again; Doc had come over to check at Gale’s prompting, felt John’s pulse, checked the bandages around John’s ribs. “He’s just tired,” was his assessment. “I’ll wake him in a few hours, in case of concussion. You can go, Major, if you like.” But

he said the words like he knew Gale would refuse.

John's the one leaning over him now, and there's blood on his face again. It's crusted at the base of his nose, just the smallest amount. Like he'd picked at a scab 'til it bled. "How'm I s'posed to treat you?" Gale asks, looking up at him, quiet and running the words together. He puts a hand, slow, on John's hip.

"How about by not sitting at the goddamn window," John replies, hauling Gale to his feet and out of sight from the guys in the yard.

It's stupid, doing this here. It's especially stupid, after having their hands on one another just an hour ago, for an entirely different reason. Gale's still not sure they've resolved. He brings his hand up and brushes beneath John's eye.

"I didn't hurt you, did I?"

"I'll live."

"So that's a yes."

"It's a, 'I'll live', Buck." John rolls his eyes. "I'm not broken. I might be—Jesus, I don't know. Fucked up, up here." He taps his temple. "But I'll live." He kisses Gale then. It is, by necessity, brief. They break apart and listen for footsteps.

"You sure about that?"

"Goddamn—" John kisses him again, "—mother—hen—"

The first time they'd done this, Gale's heart had tripped over itself so bad he'd thought he was having a heart attack. It wasn't even at the fear of being caught—it was the fact that John was so much, and he was everywhere. His clever fingers and tongue. He tasted like whiskey, because of course he did, and it was clear he was trying not to laugh as his kissed Gale, who eventually pushed John off of him with a frown. "Something funny?"

"No, nothing—"

But then John had snorted, and his mouth lost the battle he'd been fighting against a smile. "It's just, think I finally found your vice, Major Cleven. Sorry," and he'd leaned in and kissed Gale slow, "for corrupting you."

John still smiles into their kisses, more often than not. Gale's given up asking why. Only he doesn't, this time round. This time he kisses Gale like something painful. Like he can feel his own sharp edges, and casts himself on them, again and again.

"John," Gale says. John hums into his mouth. "John—Bucky—stop."

He can hear his own heartbeat when John pulls back. "Please, can you just—talk to me," he finishes lamely.

That makes John arch an eyebrow. "Ain't that all we do?" he asks, but he leans back from Gale, against the wall. "And what is it, exactly, you want to talk about?"

"I don't know, John." Gale sighs. He feels like he did those awful days after Bucky's crew arrived at the stalag without him. Like he'd just missed him. Like he's missing him, even though Bucky's standing right in front of him. "You tell me."

Something awful flashes across John's face, there and gone. Gale wants to bring it back; he wants to never see it again. "I told you," John says. "I don't know how to do this anymore."

Gale presses his lips together. John meets his eyes, but it's like he's not all there. Gale would say he looks drunk, if the lot of them hadn't been sober since '43. It's the kind of look Gale's father used to get. Not the same—but of a kind. When he'd bet on the dogs and lose. When the liquor bottles round the house rattled empty and it was late enough in the day he couldn't go out and buy another. There was an emptiness to it. A cruelty, that Gale's father forced out.

John turns it in on himself.

What is there that Gale can say? I'm sorry? It'll get better? One's a given; one feels like a lie.

Gale says it anyway. "I'm sorry." John doesn't even blink. "I—I'm sorry for hitting you. Bucky, I'm sorry you're here. I'm sorry *we're* here. I'm sorry for this—fucking war." A spark in John's eye; any other time, he'd be teasing Gale for swearing. "I want to say it gets better. But I don't know. All I know is—is you don't know how to do this anymore? I don't know how to do this without you."

John sighs; big and full-bodied. He'd crossed his arms, somewhere along the way, but he uncrosses them now. Bridges the gap between them and brushes Gale's hair from his brow. "You'd manage," he says

softly. "I'm just—background noise."

"If you think that's all you are, then you're an idiot, John Egan."

And that, at last, brings out the smile Gale's been seeking. A little lopsided, maybe. More unsure than it's ever been. "Thought this was meant to be a pep talk," he points out. "You think you know a guy..."

"Shut up," Gale says. John shuts up, still smiling. "Just—let me be there for you. Jesus, Bucky. It's not a hardship."

"Kinda feels like it is."

"I'll do it anyway." He takes John's hand where it had fallen down by his side. "Okay?"

"Okay." Gale squeezes. "*Okay*, Jesus! First you hit me, then you break my hand."

"Pretty sure you started it."

"Well, maybe I knew you'd finish it." John glances quick toward the window and the door; pulls Gale in close. "Always lookin' after me, Buck. Don't know what I would've done if you hadn't..."

"But I didn't," Gale tells him firmly. "So you can't either, alright?"

"Bossy," John murmurs, and when Gale kisses him, for as long as they can afford, he feels it, same as always. John's smile against his.

End Notes

waves my chronic pain wand over all my favourite characters

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!